

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01625824 6

A Y R

HE
G7793 2




Presented to
The Library
of the
University of Toronto
by

Dr. John Henderson.







Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

To

Robert Shuthers Esq
with the compliments
of the Author.

Aug 18th Aug 1844



HE
G7793a

Gray, Henry C.

THE AULD TOUN O' AYR

AND

ITS HISTORY SINCE 1800,

WITH

INCIDENTS & ANECDOTES.

*The proceeds of this Publication to be devoted to the
Ayr Public Library.*

A Y R

SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1872.

278844
18. 10. 32

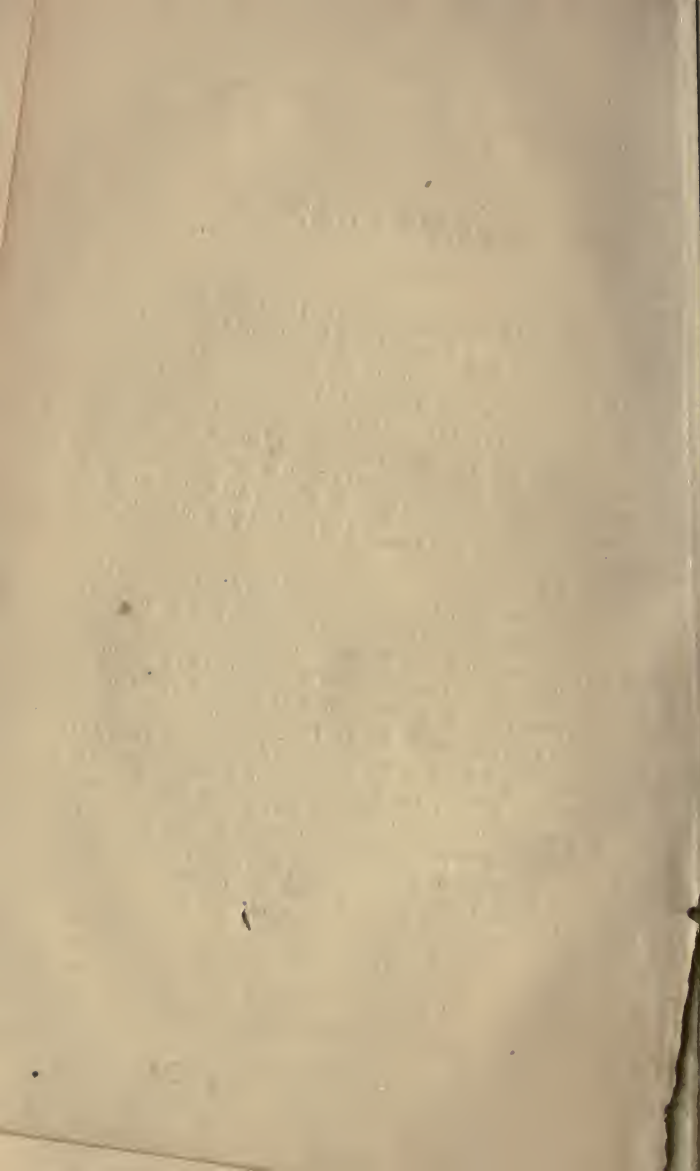


P R E F A C E.

THE annexed Lecture, by HENRY C. GRAY, Esq., banker, was delivered to a crowded and influential audience in the Ayr Assembly Rooms, on the evening of Thursday the 18th ult., at the request of the Committee of the AYR PUBLIC LIBRARY AND READING ROOM. It appeared at length in the *Ayr Advertiser* of dates the 25th January and 1st February; and a general desire having been expressed that it should be issued in a separate form, the author has revised it and made a few additions.

MR GEMMELL, Frankville, on taking the chair at the meeting when the lecture was delivered, said he begged to congratulate the lecturer on the very crowded attendance. It might seem superfluous to introduce MR GRAY to an audience in Ayr, where he was born and had resided all his life; and not less superfluous to bespeak for him an attentive hearing, as from his known ability, and his powers of research into his subject—"The Auld Town of Ayr since 1800"—he was sure to deliver a lecture instructive to the young as to the place of their nativity, and both interesting and amusing to the oldest among his audience.

AYR, 29th Feby., 1872.



THE AULD TOUN O' AYR, &c.

THE place of our birth always presents peculiar attractions, and awakens within our bosoms feelings of the most tender emotion, which neither time nor distance can efface. Everything connected with it is treasured up in the memory, especially the scenes and associations of our youth; and these ever and anon come up before the mind's eye, and afford a fruitful theme of contemplation. You wander back over the many changes through which it has passed, one object after another presenting itself in quick succession; most conspicuous among which are the dear old buildings with which you were familiar, and in some of which, it may be, many of your happiest moments were spent, and the well-known faces of parties occupying prominent positions that have long since disappeared: and when you look around you at the new race that has sprung up, and the altered state of things as they now appear, reflections of a varied character force themselves upon you, and you are lost in a kind of reverie. It has been said of those you love—"Absence makes the heart grow fonder," and we believe this is equally true of the place of your birth. Should it so happen that circumstances have led you to foreign shores, or to some of our colonies, to fight the battle of life, you are animated to increased energy by the hope that you may one day return to your native place, laden with sufficient wealth to enable you to spend with comfort your remaining days, and to have your bones laid

side by side with those near and dear to you, slumbering in the silent tomb. If resident within easy distance, every now and then you take a lingering look behind, and as occasion offers, you seize the opportunity of revisiting the much-loved spot, and gaze with admiring eye on everything which gives it an improved appearance, and raises its character in general estimation. When wandering from home, you come by chance upon some townsman, with whom perhaps you have had no previous intimacy and never so much as exchanged words, the fact that you hail from the same place at once lights up the countenance, establishes a bond of relationship between you, and leads to an interchange of inquiries about everything new and important which may have occurred in the "guid auld toun" since you set out on your journey. What but this feeling has induced many on distant shores to take by the hand some stripling who has emigrated thither, of whose existence he knew nothing, until the letter of introduction was opened by him? Enough for him that they have a common birthplace, or that they are allied in some way or other to the same town, to draw forth his kindly sympathies towards the young stranger, and to help him to make such a favourable start in life as to ensure ultimate success, and bring honour and credit to all concerned. This feeling, I believe, is more frequently manifested by those of our own country than of any other, and so far from being a reproach, as some would have it, is cause for congratulation. It is quite natural that members of the same community should take a certain interest in each other, especially in those struggling to better their circumstances; and of what are we generally more proud than that some poet, or warrior, or statesman of renown, or merchant prince, or some notable person, was born or brought up in our

midst? We claim a special interest in him, and a participation in the honour achieved.

A native of the place, born about the beginning of the present century, and having left it soon afterwards without again revisiting it, would very naturally begin his inquiries by asking questions as to the different alterations that had taken place—whether such and such a house still stood where it had formerly been? whether so and so, whom he once knew, was still living? whether certain customs still existed? what new houses had been erected? and generally in what respects it now differed from the period at which he knew it? No description, nothing, indeed, short of a personal visit, could satisfactorily answer his inquiries, or convey anything like an accurate representation to him of things as they exist. On the other hand, a party born within the last few years, looking around at things as he finds them, and anxious to know something of the past, would direct his inquiries to the appearance which the place presented at the beginning of the century and for many years afterwards—the habits and customs which then prevailed—the characters and celebrities of the period—and, generally, the state of matters which then existed, so as to form something like a correct idea of the improvements which had been effected, and the changes, social and otherwise, which had occurred. It is to the latter of these that our attention is now to be directed, and to the young as well as to the old it presents a subject of much interest, opening up a rich field of study, and suggesting mingled thoughts of joy and sorrow. Unfortunately, so far as our town is concerned, we have a very meagre account of anything connected with it during the present century—nothing in short but a few scraps scattered here and there—and it has been thought by many a very desirable thing that this desideratum, to a certain

extent, should be supplied, so long as we have amongst us several worthies who have more than reached the allotted space of three score years and ten, who have witnessed the successive changes which time in its onward flight has brought along with it, and who are thoroughly conversant with every minute particular, and in many things took a leading part. I have in consequence put myself in communication with these parties, and what I have gleaned from them and other sources I have endeavoured to condense as much as possible, so as to present you with a bird's-eye view of Ayr as it was, and of many incidents connected with its history which are apt to be forgotten. The material placed at my command is more abundant than I had any conception of, and I take this opportunity of stating, with much pleasure, that wherever I applied, the utmost eagerness has been manifested to give me every information which could be turned to any advantage. It must not be supposed, however, that I am going to attempt anything like a connected history—I can merely touch upon the more salient points, and endeavour to put them in as connected a form as possible.

Beginning then with the outward appearance of the town, the most notable object which struck the eye of the visitor as he entered from Newton was the old steeple, with Jail and Court House, which then stood in the centre of Sandgate Street, and almost in front of the entrance to what was then called the "Schule Vennel," but now by the more refined and classical epithet of Academy Street. It stood with its front towards the New Bridge, and extended backwards about 36 yards. The space on either side was very limited, and afforded very little accommodation for traffic. The ground floor on the west was occupied by cellars, which were rented to various parties. On the east side the fire engines

were kept, and underneath the steeple was the Tron, which was used for weighing anything and everything. The entrance to the interior was by a flight of steps well known in these days as the "nineteen steps;" and on the east side thereof was a dungstead, composed of the sweepings of the streets, and into which was emptied all the refuse of the Jail—certainly a very strange place for such a *depot*, and not very agreeable to the olfactory nerves. How such a nuisance could ever have been tolerated there, is past our comprehensions. On the landing you were introduced through a wide lobby to the Court House, in which the different Courts were held, including the Justiciary Court: and it is worthy of remark that the great orator and statesman, Lord Brougham, who commenced life as a Scotch advocate, made his first public appearance in the Justiciary Court held here as counsel in a civil action. In connection with his employment, it is related of him that the party by whom he was engaged, after giving him the history of the case, proceeded to point out to him the line of argument he should employ, when he was stopped by the young advocate, who told him to give him the facts and leave the argument to himself. Under the Court House, on the right of the lobby as you entered, were two condemned cells, and farther forward were the Debtors' Rooms, extending the width of the building, and the other cells for criminals were in the tower above the Court House. Solitary confinement for prisoners was then unknown, two and three being frequently in one cell, and escapes were very frequent. The jailer in charge merely attended to their wants throughout the day, and locked up the place at night, living with his family outside. The prisoners, of course, were left to do very much as they liked, and it was no uncommon thing to see stockings and bags let

down from their cells to receive contributions of money or tobacco or any other portable thing, and then drawn up by means of the cord to which they were attached. A party informs me that he has been hailed in the street at night as he was passing along, by one of the prisoners, and asked to purchase tobacco for him. From the sanguinary nature of the laws which then existed, theft, robbery, forgery, and other such crimes being punishable by death, executions were very frequent, as many as three being hanged at one time, and these executions took place in front of the Buildings. Like other Burghs in which Circuit Courts were held, a hangman resident in the place was indispensable, and the last official in that character, supported out of the town funds, was James Aird, who had a free house in the Wallace Tower, where he lived alone. No one held any communication with him, and when he walked abroad he was constantly muttering to himself. His time was principally occupied in taming mice and rats and birds, and working all manner of pranks with them. It is said of him that he never bought bread twice in succession from the same baker, lest he should be poisoned, and for the same reason he brought his water from the various springs in the same neighbourhood. It was part of his duty to be bellringer at the Wallace Tower, and several days having elapsed without the bells being rung, a suspicion arose that something was wrong, the door of the Tower was burst open, and he was found dead. After his death the situation continued vacant, and executioners were brought from a distance when their services were required. The condemned cells in the old jail being so near the street, the passers-by could hear the poor unfortunates at their devotional exercises, and on such occasions large numbers of people would assemble. An execution is at all times a painful sight, but to those

resident within the vicinity of the jail these precursors to it must have been doubly distressing, and we think the change in the law which has recently come into operation, by which executions are no longer public, is a most beneficial and salutary one. It was long felt that the building was not only unsuitable for the public accommodation, but an obstruction to the thoroughfare, and it was resolved to remove it. The present commodious County Buildings and Jail were in consequence erected, and after their completion the old building was demolished in 1825. Adjoining this building on the west side, now occupied by the National Bank of Scotland, was what was occupied as the Town Clerk's office, and formerly as the Douglas and Heron Bank, which occasioned so much ruin to many families in the county. It had what was called a jinking stair in the form of two stairs outside, and an entrance from beneath connected with them, and was a source of much attraction and amusement to the youths of that day. A few doors further up, on the same side, lived the Rev. Dr Dalrymple, one of the ministers of Ayr; and immediately opposite, on the other side of the street, down a close, lived his colleague, the Rev. Dr M'Gill, whose house is still visible. Farther up Sandgate Street, at the left corner of Cathcart Street, was the house occupied by Lady Dumfries, but at this time Cathcart Street had not been opened up, the whole ground behind being occupied as a garden in connection with her house. A number of the aristocracy seem to have lived in the town in those days, for in the same street, next the Post Office, lived Lady Cunningham of Robertland; and in the large house, on the opposite side, lived Lady Cathcart. The opening of the Fort grounds is but of recent origin, the Fort being formerly an enclosure, carefully guarded against intruders, and possessing peculiar rights and privileges of its own,

over which the Burgh Magistrates had no control. The Tower which has been remodelled and fitted up as a modern dwelling by its present proprietor, is a venerable relic of the Burgh or Parish Church, founded in the 12th century and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. No place was at one time more resorted to by the youths of the town, the more daring of whom would climb to the top, from which you had a most extensive view as far as the eye could reach, of Arran Hills and the country around. Beyond the head of Sandgate Street towards the sea, as far as Wheatfield on the Racecourse Road, was a wide expanse of vacant ground, with nothing to intercept the view except a few sand knowes here and there, and the only building that stood on that space was the Town's Wash-house, at the head of Charlotte Street, whither the town's-people resorted in great numbers to have their clothes washed. The pump-well in connection with it contained water of the purest kind, and for many years prior to the introduction of our present supply, parties carried it a considerable distance for domestic purposes. All and sundry took advantage of this wash-house, which as may well be supposed was a school for scandal. When the clothes were laid out on the green to be bleached or dried, some member of the family to which they belonged would keep watch over them. With the exception of the house at the corner of Barns Street, belonging to Mrs Montgomerie Hamilton, and built originally by Mr Quintin Johnston, writer, there was not a single house along the Racecourse Road as far as the Racecourse itself. Barns House, though now approached by that road, had a public road which passed it in a line with Carrick Street, and joined the Racecourse Road where the toll now stands. The then proprietor was allowed

to shut up this road on opening up a road now called Barns Street ; and this was the commencement of the feuing of that street. Miller Road, now intersecting the Racecourse and Maybole roads, is only of yesterday, and is certainly a great convenience to the inhabitants of that district.

The removal of the old Jail was the pioneer to other alterations in the neighbourhood—new houses being erected, as well as the present handsome spire and buildings, which, from a report which I have seen, were only to cost £6000, but it amounted to little short of £10,000. The foundation stone was laid with Masonic honours on 28th March, 1828. It is impossible to conceive a greater change than that which was effected in the whole of this locality ; and much praise is due to those who were the instruments of it. We have been repeatedly told that at one time it was designed to erect the Town Buildings on the site now occupied by the Post Office, but the price asked was more than the authorities were willing to give, and negotiations were broken off. Had this site been secured, one advantage certainly would have been, that they would have had a more imposing appearance ; and the spire, which is considered second to none in the kingdom, would have appeared to greater advantage, and been seen at a greater distance than it now is. During a severe thunder-storm in the winter of 1835, the spire was struck by lightning and two stones were dislodged, which caused great consternation at the time, but fortunately no other damage was sustained ; and the injured part was repaired during the following summer. A lightning conductor was then erected, the utility of which was afterwards made apparent, as in 1863 the spire was again struck by lightning, the shock caused by which was felt in the neighbourhood ; but the electric

fluid passed down the conductor, and no bad consequences ensued.

Proceeding from the Town Buildings up High Street, we would notice the King's Arms Hotel, which was rebuilt upwards of 30 years ago, in consequence of a fire which then occurred. The old building stood back from the line of street about five yards. The entrance to it was through an open space in front, and on either side was a little flat-roofed building, one of which was occupied as a shop, and the other was used as a reading room. As news travelled then very slowly, and newspapers were very scarce, it was very common during periods of excitement for crowds of people to assemble in front, on the arrival of the mail, and not disperse until one of our more respectable townsmen, such as the late Dr Philip Whiteside and George Taylor, came out and read aloud the leading article of some London newspaper, or some paragraph of national interest. What a contrast in this respect from the times in which we live, when even in remote country districts the penny newspaper is daily to be found, conveying intelligence of events far and near, telegraphed with lightning speed up to the hour of going to press? On the opposite side of the King's Arms was a recess of considerable extent, and within this recess, as also on the public street in front, the Butter and Egg Market was regularly held. This market was subsequently removed to what was then called the Newyards, where the Macneille Buildings now stand, and the Cheese and Corn Market were added to it, and henceforth the name was changed to that of Newmarket Street. Fish Cross, as it is still called, was the regular market for fish, which were brought in baskets, and retailed by women who took up their position there, and there was a stone cross in the centre where the fish were weighed. It is only a very few years since

this market ceased to be used, the trade having been diverted to private shops; and its discontinuance is not to be regretted. The situation was too public, and the tongues of the females reminded you of Billingsgate. On one occasion a number of parties had gone to Glasgow to hear some great actor, and a well-known worthy of the day was anxious to hear what inducement had taken them thither. In answer to his enquiry he was told that they went to see "The Passions." "The passions," said he, "let them gang to the Fish Cross, and they will there see the passions." Opposite the Fish Cross is the street leading to the "Auld Brig," said by some to have been built in the reign of Alexander III., 1249-1285; and by others, between 1470 and 1525, by two maiden ladies, who, tradition states, spent their fortunes in the undertaking. The only mode of crossing the river was by means of a ford a little farther up, called the "Docket Stream;" and, as many lives were sacrificed, especially when the floods came down, these ladies were influenced to erect the "Brig" by the philanthropic desire to prevent this sacrifice of life. Fears of its safety were entertained a few years ago, from injuries sustained at its base, by the breaking-up of the ice on the "Mill Dam," but these proved groundless. The injuries were repaired, and, in the language of our immortal Bard, it can still address its neighbour, the "New Brig," as follows:—

"Thus many a year I've stood the flood and tide,
And tho' wi' crazy eild I'm sair forfairn,
I'll be a Brig when ye're a shapeless cairn."

Proceeding upwards we come to what is now called the Winton Buildings, which occupies the site of what was formerly the old Meal Market, which at one time was a place of much resort, as meal, like butcher meat, could then only be had at the public

market, and though the market has long since been abolished, the custom then exacted for meal is still levied from all retailers. When it came to be disused, which was a considerable time before its demolition, it was occupied as a flesh market by Mr James Rodger, who was quite an original in many views which he entertained. A friend was speaking to him about the Newtonian theory of the earth moving round the sun, when he exclaimed, "Awa' with sic nonsense. How can that be when I find my sheep hanging in the morning whaur I left them the nicht before." Another remark by him on the same subject was—"If that were the case, the sea would a' spill, and we would all fall on the top of ane anither." John Curle, who was well known in his day, entertained similar notions, and when the same subject was mooted to him, he remarked, "How can that be, for I have driven the coach for 30 years between Ayr and Kilmarnock, and the half-way house aye stauns whaur it used to do." Still proceeding upwards, we come to Wallace Tower. There is a tradition that Sir William Wallace was once confined in this tower; but this is disputed. It was originally a rough square building, culminating in a point, and consisted of an upper and under flat. We have seen somewhere an account of it, in which the writer somewhat fancifully describes it as follows:—"The bottom was pure barn-work—the middle dovecote—and the top, steeple, presenting, *in toto*, somewhat the appearance of a willow, double grafted in a squat thorn." With the view of modernising it, and giving it a more handsome appearance, it was resolved in 1830 to face it with hewn stone, but it was found in the progress of the work that the foundation could not bear the extra weight, and it was consequently taken down and rebuilt. The statue of the Scottish Chief which occupies the niche in front

of the building, the workmanship of which is admitted on all hands to be good, was erected by public subscription at a cost of 120 guineas, chiefly through the exertions of the late Mr David Auld, Doonbrae Cottage, a great friend of the Sculptor, whose chisel also gave such living likenesses of Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny, now deposited, by the same friendly exertions of Mr Auld, in the small house erected by him on the grounds surrounding Burns's Monument. Beyond the Tower, on to Kyle Street, numerous houses projected on the pavement on both sides, which were a great obstruction to foot passengers as well as an eyesore to everybody. There is only one now remaining, and we hope that it also will soon be numbered among the things that were. The Cow Vennel, or Alloway Street as it is now called, was very narrow, and many of the houses were occupied by a low class of lodgers, who were of a migratory character. With the view of having a better access to the town, the Road Trustees, about 30 years ago, purchased these houses, and made the street what it now is. Kyle Street also has partaken of the general improvement. At the head of it, on the right and left of the road joining Mill Street, were two quarries, one of which long remained full of stagnant water, and was the scene of many a disaster; but these quarries were filled up when the railway was extended to Carrick, and the ground thus reclaimed is occupied by the Railway Station and other buildings in the vicinity.

Turning to the harbour, much might be said on the changes that have taken place there; but these are patent to everyone, and the mere fact that its revenue has increased so rapidly and extensively since 1800, is sufficient of itself to satisfy you that great improvements must have been effected, For instance, the

revenue in 1800 was £376 3s; in 1830 £1065 7s 7d; and at the last annual statement in 1871 it had risen to £5071 17s 2d. The mineral resources of the district have contributed principally to this prosperity. Apart from the collieries of a more recent date in St Quivox parish, there was at an earlier period a coal-pit near the Pilot House, another on the site now occupied by the Militia Stores, and a third near the Fort Wall, behind the Citadel Stores. There was also a coal-pit near where the Lighthouse now is, another at the Salt Pans, a third at the head of Newton, and a fourth near the Old Bridge End. Other districts are now contributing their store of wealth, and the prospect of a greater increase of shipment is more than likely to be realized. Everything is being done to provide suitable accommodation and to make the harbour as attractive as possible; and, if we had only "wet docks" in which vessels could constantly float, we would be able to compete more successfully with the other ports along the Clyde.

In connection with the Harbour, few sights at one time presented a more animated appearance than the arrival of the small crafts from Arran, on the occasion of the Midsummer or July fair. Crowds collected to see their arrival, and the treatment which was extended to them was disgraceful. These crafts generally brought with them a quantity of live cattle, potatoes, fish, and other etceteras, and they returned laden with goods which had been purchased; but now, in consequence of the facilities afforded by steam-boats which ply between Glasgow and Arran, the trade here has long since ceased. They were often suspected of bringing along with them some of the real Highland whisky, and the tide-waiters were constantly on the watch, to pounce upon any which they might discover. A very exciting scene was witnessed

on one occasion. A little wherry arrived, ladened to the gunwale with potatoes, and as the harbour was at the time crowded with vessels, she took up an outlying position in a place that was then called the Ratten Hole. Whether the tide-waiters had got the hint or not, there was a strong suspicion that "John Barleycorn" lay concealed under the potatoes, and they at once boarded her. The boatmen were much taken by surprise, and as the wind at the time was blowing a fresh breeze out to sea, they took advantage of it. One of them having whispered to the other in Gaelic, took charge of the helm and the main sail; the other having cut the mooring with a hatchet, hoisted the fore sail. The little wherry, as if catching the contagion, wheeled about with her head to the sea, and sailed gallantly down the harbour, amid the cheers of the crowds who lined both sides of the river. A cry was raised for help, in the King's name and authority, but the cry was unheeded, and the boat was allowed to proceed, and was lost in the distance. It is said that those on board were transferred to a fishing smack, which brought them back after a short delay, and this midsummer excursion afforded mirth and amusement for many a day afterwards, and was rather a sore subject to those who had thus been taken captive against their will.

Crossing the "New Brig," which was widened and otherwise improved in 1840, we come to Newton and Wallace-town, which are merely separated from our town by a river, and now form part of the Parliamentary Burgh. There has always been a rivalry between the two sides of the water, pitched stone battles being very common in my youth, and even as far back as the memory of the oldest living inhabitant. The combatants entered upon these battles with as much earnestness and excitement as if the fate of a kingdom depended upon the result, and

those on the Ayr side would rush to the conflict with the shout—

“Ye Newton diels, lift up your heels,
And let the Toun anes by you.”

A better feeling now exists, and the war cry is no longer heard. Attempts are being made to bring the three localities more closely together in municipal government, but whether or not these be successful, they are to all intents and purposes one town, and should have a common interest in each other's welfare. The most noticeable of the changes in Newton is the opening of what is called the New Road, the only direct outlet to the main road previous to that being Weaver Street. From Weaver Street downwards to the river there was an open burn or lade, which ran down the centre of Newton, and immediately opposite the U.P. Church, in connection with this burn, was a malt mill, which was afterwards partly inhabited, and it contracted the width of the street very much. A burn in the centre of a street was, to say the least of it, very awkward, especially for any whose centre of gravity was easily upset, and many laughable scenes might be related. The burn at first was covered over as far as the Newton Steeple, but latterly, about thirty years ago, it was wholly covered over. The malt mill was at same time removed, and the whole street put into repair. Pity it is that the improvement had not been more extensive, for the west side is neither pleasant to the eye nor agreeable to the feet, and a little additional expenditure would have made it as fine a street as could have been desired. The reigning authorities, if so inclined, have here an opportunity of distinguishing themselves, and it is to be hoped they will take advantage of it. The ground running from what is called Newton Terrace towards the sea was a vacant space, with a large pool of water, which, when covered

with ice, afforded much amusement to skaters and others. At one time a company of soldiers was encamped there, and their commander, the Earl of Darlington, who lived in the house called Lottery Hall, made a road to this encampment, and it was in consequence named Darlington Road. Wallacetown has not undergone much change, beyond the erection of the houses leading from the Old Bridge along John Street, and the improvement of River Street. Certainly one of the greatest improvements now being carried on is the filling up of the large quarry, which caught the eye of every traveller as he passed along the line of railway, and for this the spirited proprietor deserves our thanks.

With the advantages which we now possess, it must be matter of astonishment to every one how those who lived in the early period of this century were able to wend their way along our streets during the winter evenings, as the little artificial light which was emitted only made the darkness "more visible." Here and there at distant spots was to be found a lamp, dimly lighted with oil, which a puff of wind easily blew out. One of our old inhabitants informs me, that when he commenced business in 1809, there were only two shops in the town that used oil lamps, the others being lit up with a tallow candle standing on the counter, not always accompanied by snuffers, so that the light burned more dimly. At this time our friend opened a shop under the old Assembly Rooms, which was brilliantly lighted, and the sight being so novel, it attracted crowds for several evenings. Being desirous of knowing what effect was produced on the bystanders, he stole out of his shop, and mingled with them, and he was much tickled on hearing one say, "It may do a wee while, but it'll no last lang;" and another remarked, "He has mair siller than wit." A similar prejudice was

manifested by many on the introduction of gas, and for long numbers refused to burn it. As might be expected, the darkness which prevailed was frequently taken advantage of by those bent on crime and plunder. A police-officer was then unknown, but there were four town-officers who strutted about with their red coats during the day, and afforded what protection they could, but during the night there was no protection whatever. To remedy this state of matters as far as possible, a number of young men banded themselves together and perambulated the streets during the worst part of the night, and they became a terror to evil-doers. In course of time, however, they forgot themselves, and so far from being a protection they became a nuisance, interfering with the peaceable inhabitants, and committing such misdeeds that they obtained the name of the "Black Gang," and found it prudent to disband themselves. Small as the number of town officers was, their influence was very considerable, and the young miscreant stood more in awe of them than of the police at the present day. The inhabitants, however, had to depend a good deal upon themselves for protection. The male portion of them were enrolled as special constables—the town was divided into districts, and the constables resident in these districts elected their own Captain, at whose bidding they required to turn out personally or by substitute, and patrol the streets, to prevent any disturbances that might take place. This was the case especially on Saturday evenings, and their watch would then extend to far in the morning; but fortunately they were not allowed to fast all the time, their Captain taking care that they should have a suitable supply of the good things of this life. This practice continued less or more till the adoption of the General Police Act for Scotland of 1850. They had also other

duties imposed upon them. When, on the apprehension of Burke and Hare in 1829, the country was excited from one end to the other by the horrid revelations of the numerous murders which they had perpetrated, in order to supply subjects for the dissecting room, steps were at once taken to have the churchyard watched to prevent the Resurrectionists, as they were called, from removing bodies recently interred, and all having relations buried there took their regular turn in these night watches, which you may be sure required nerve and courage of no ordinary nature. Many false alarms occurred, as was quite natural under the circumstances, and the more timid were even afraid of venturing out of doors without an escort. The excitement after a time subsided, and as a substitute for these watches iron mort-safes were called into requisition, and it is only within these past few years that they have been wholly discontinued.

At the time we speak of, our town, I am sorry to say, was famed for "dirty streets and broken causeways," and it was no uncommon thing for dung-steads to be seen in front of the houses in Kyle Street and elsewhere. It consequently required some little skill to navigate your way in the darkness, and the means of locomotion were so limited that you had no alternative but walk on your feet when going to spend the evening with a friend. Cabs were then unknown. There were a few sedan chairs, but unless bespoke in good time, they could not be had. There were also one or two cars, and a gig, which seemed to supply all the demand; and those wishing to travel a few miles generally engaged saddle horses, of which there were a few. From all accounts, indeed, the art of riding was then more cultivated than now, the reason, no doubt, being that there was very little choice. If you wanted to travel a farther distance, you had the stage-coach at your command, and but for

its slowness, no mode of travelling is more exhilarating or pleasant, provided you have good weather. You required, however, to have your name booked for the journey a day or two beforehand, otherwise you could not rely on a seat being obtained. The departure, but especially the arrival, of these stage-coaches always attracted a number of onlookers, and a visit to Glasgow or elsewhere could not well be accomplished without forming subject of conversation to the gossiping. To avoid this many would walk on foot to the head of Newton or alight there, so that their movements might not be known. Few who have all along been accustomed to the comforts of the railway, can have any idea of what travellers had then to endure who had long journeys to undertake.

Sailing vessels and smacks also afforded means of communication between various ports, and soon after the introduction of steam, a company was formed, which secured a steamer called "The Ayr, of Ayr," which plied twice a week between Ayr and Glasgow. She was considered a good steamer, and was largely patronised, but she had not been long on the station when one dark night, in sailing down the Clyde, she fell foul of another steamer called "The Comet," nearly opposite Gourock, and sank her. No fewer than sixty persons found a watery grave, and the sad event provoked much discussion. The investigation and trial brought out the fact that the Comet did not display her lights, otherwise the accident could not have occurred; and what rendered it all the more painful, was, that at the very time of the accident the passengers on board the Comet were enjoying music and dancing. A ballad was composed on the occasion, and for long afterwards, wherever you went, you heard its doleful tale hummed over by some wandering minstrel.

Trade and commerce being then hampered by so many restrictions, were not carried on upon the same extensive scale as at present. Our merchants were content with small accommodation, and the very best of them lived above their shops, rising early and toiling late, and were quite content with their one or two holidays throughout the year. Weaving was very brisk and remunerative, and gave employment to a large number of hands. Shoemaking also received an impetus from one of the master shoemakers having, during the Peninsular War, a contract with Government to supply shoes to the army; and so long as the contract lasted, which was for several years, it gave employment to fully 1000 hands. There were then no public works of any consequence, which as now employ so many workmen, the carpet manufactory being then in its infancy, and trade generally was pursued in a quiet and unostentatious manner. There was a kind of work called Ayrshire needle-work, which had its origin here, gave extensive employment to females, and was in great demand for many years, but in course of time tambouring and machinery drove it out of the market, and any sewing that is now done is most miserably paid. So long as the demand lasted it gave support to many families; and many a scanty income of the more respectable was largely supplemented by it. A few, as always happens, were more successful in business than others, and realised considerable fortunes; and, generally speaking, there was a spirit of contentment pervading the community. The poor were well cared for, and it was only as a last resort that any one would apply for parochial aid. There was a noble independence in this respect, which it is much to be regretted has now almost disappeared. It was considered a stigma on the character of any one in a comfortable position if he allowed a poor relative, even distantly con-

nected, to become burdensome to the parish. No wonder that the expenditure on the poor was then so little—not more than £500 as recently as 1830, while at the present moment it has reached £3500 per annum. It may give you some idea of the state of trade, to be informed that up to 1825, there were only two public banks in Ayr, viz., the Bank of Scotland and Hunters & Company, now merged in the Union Bank of Scotland, while at the present moment we have one for every day in the week, Sunday included. Hunters & Company had then a branch in Maybole, and another in Kilmarnock, and the British Linen Company had one in Irvine; and these banks, five in number, were the only public banks in Ayrshire. Banking business was then conducted in an entirely different manner from the present. The principal object then, as now, was to secure deposits, but customers had not the same facilities for getting bills discounted. It was no uncommon thing for a respectable party in presenting a bill for discount, to be told to call back in a day or two, and when he returned to have his bill refused. On one occasion, a well-to-do farmer presented a bill in the Bank of Scotland, which the accountant took to the agent in an adjoining room, and when he returned he handed it back to the farmer, saying that “it was not convenient.” The farmer was rather taken aback, and being anxious for the money, he exclaimed, “An’ whaun will it be convenient?” He, in his ignorance, naturally thought that the bank was short of money, whereas it was only a polite way of refusal. A gentleman now living, who was a teller in one of the Ayr banks in 1825 and for several years afterwards, informs me that when in the service of the bank, he was sadly annoyed with the number of forged Scotch notes which were then in circulation. Scarcely a market day passed without one or more being presented in the usual

course of business. He kept a note in a memorandum book of the number which he had received, and the names of the persons presenting them, and they amounted to upwards of 200. The notes so tendered were returned to the parties by whom they were presented after a private mark had been put upon them, accompanied with a caution not to issue them again, as the consequences would be serious; and yet, notwithstanding this caution, many of these notes again appeared, and it was deemed expedient that an example should be made of the offenders. A one pound note was presented both at the Bank of Scotland and Hunters and Company's Bank, and it was traced back to the first-known issuer of it, who turned out to be a party in extensive business who kept a large account at both banks. One of his workmen paid it to a shopkeeper with whom he had dealings, and by him it was presented at the Bank of Scotland. The teller knew from his private mark from whom it had come, and taxed the gentleman with the offence, but he denied that he had ever such a note in his possession. Meanwhile, the matter got wind, and reached the ears of the late Provost Fullarton of Skeldon, who knew the gentleman intimately. One morning the Provost called at the bank, as he did very frequently, to get change for a one pound note, which he generally received in sixpences, to distribute amongst the necessitous, and drawing in his chair to the fire, commenced a general conversation. When about to leave, he carelessly remarked, "By the bye, I hear you have a forged note in your possession, supposed to be issued by a neighbour of mine. I have never seen a forged note in my life, and would like to see the one you have." The teller got it out of a small drawer and handed it to him, and after examining it, he failed to see that it was forged until the difference had been pointed

out to him. Some one having come in on business, the teller's attention was taken away for a minute, and when he looked round he found the Provost had thrust the note into the fire, and held one of his feet over it until it was completely consumed. He then threw down a one pound note on the counter, and, with his usual politeness, bowed himself gracefully out, saying, "I have put an end to that concern, which might have terminated in another way." Such an act of generosity was only in keeping with the truly noble character of the Provost, who lived respected and died regretted by the whole community.

A party was apprehended in the act of passing these notes at one of the fairs in the county, and from information obtained from him, it appeared that they were being largely manufactured in Belfast. Steps were immediately taken by Angus Gunn, the then chief constable—who was acknowledged to be at the very head of his profession—to find out the parties, and he proceeded to Belfast, accompanied by David Norman, at that time an auctioneer, and one of the best imitators of character that could be found. David disguised himself as a native of the Emerald Isle, and assuming the Irish brogue, he threw himself in the way of those who were engaged in the manufacture of the notes, and having gained their confidence, he gave them an order to have a certain quantity of the notes ready for delivery at a particular time and place, when he promised to call for them. The police had meanwhile been communicated with, and, having been apprized of the arrangement, a posse of their number, along with Angus Gunn, accompanied Norman to the place of rendezvous, broke open the door, and secured the parties. They were brought here and put upon trial, and two of their number were convicted and

banished. The circulation of forged notes thereafter ceased.

In addition to the two public banks before mentioned, there was a private discounting one carried on by Mr Henry Cowan, a well-known merchant in Ayr, who had the public spirit to erect a statue of Sir William Wallace in Newmarket Street. When meal was selling as high as 5s per peck, he issued 5s notes, payable on demand, and silver being scarce at the time, they had a very extensive circulation. The usury laws were then in existence, and it was held to be something like felony to charge more than 5 per cent. discount; but this difficulty was got over by charging an additional sum by way of commission. He certainly displayed great ingenuity in one of his methods of adding to his income, and that was the following:—Every bill requires to be written on a stamp, and I have often heard it affirmed as a fact that his practice was to write the bill as near the top as possible, and when the amount was paid, to cut the writing off, so as not to interfere with the stamp, and it served for another Bill. He left considerable property, and did many generous acts. One remark he often made, and it was this—"Solomon was the wisest of men, but I think I am wiser. He did not know whether the son who would succeed him would be a wise man or a fool, but I have no doubt on the subject."

The habits and customs which prevailed differed very materially from what now exist. Powdered hair, knee-breeches, and even the pig-tail hanging from the head, gave rather a picturesque appearance to those moving amongst the more respectable class of society. Knee-breeches, indeed, were long the common dress, but gradually they crept out of fashion, and were supplanted by those now in use. The dress of the females so often varies, that to give a description of it for a definite period would,

almost baffle us. At the time to which we refer, the Parisian fashions did not exercise that unlimited sway which they now do, and there was not the same thirst for change as now prevails. In connection with this you have heard the story of a farmer who got a commission from his wife to purchase a new bonnet. On his way home he met a friend who wanted him to spend the afternoon with him. "Na, na," said he, "I canna do that, for I have got a new bonnet for my wife, and I maun hurry hame with it lest the fashions change before I reach hame." Johnson defines a bonnet as a covering for the head, and the bonnets worn at an early period fully answered that definition, and were as unlike the present as two things possibly could be, and they generally continued in the fashion for a considerable time. Every female when married wore a cap or mutch, and this was her distinguishing characteristic. Clubs for gentlemen were very common, and went under different names. The members had their stated nights of meeting, and as no Forbes M'Kenzie Act was then in existence, these meetings not unfrequently extended over midnight. I have been told that for supper the usual thing was a bit of oat cake spread with toasted cheese, and a drink of ale, after which the toddy began, and the crack waged "fast and furious." The highest in social position did not consider it beneath himself to frequent these clubs, and as they met on a common level, all manner of topics were discussed without the slightest reserve. These clubs, in fact, were pretty general throughout Scotland, and were an outlet for wit and humour, which would otherwise never have been heard of. Many good stories could be told in connection with them; but to appreciate them properly, the names of the parties would require to be given, and this you know is not always allowable, nor yet agreeable to their

descendants or those related to them. An old gentleman from Wellington Square was in the habit of frequenting one of these clubs which was held in the Boat Vennel. Being rather late of coming home occasionally, his wife was desirous of seeing what kind of a place had such an attraction for him, and she went one day and asked for the landlady and requested to be shown the room in which the club met. She was taken upstairs and shown into it, and there she saw a wooden floor covered with brey, a hardwood table, and chairs, and spittoons. She thanked the landlady and left. Shortly after this she got a little room in her own house fitted up in a similar manner, and taking her husband to it, said—"Now, there is a place where you can enjoy yourself, without going down to yon low neighbourhood and spending your evenings." He at once wheeled round on his heel, and giving a whistle, said—"You're not so and so"—in other words it wanted the company. Another lady tried a different method with her husband, who also lived in Wellington Square and frequented a club held in the Isle Lane. About the hour at which her husband left, she marched into his room fully equipped for going out. He was astonished to see her in her travelling garb, and asked her where she was going at such a late hour, when she replied that a number of the ladies whose husbands frequented clubs had met together and resolved that as their husbands seemed to enjoy themselves so much, they thought they would imitate their example and had taken a room in a house adjoining that in which their husbands met, and she was just on her way to attend the gathering. Knowing the determined character of the wife, the husband took fright, and agreed in future to give the wife the benefit of his company at home. I am not aware of the existence of any such clubs now, and whilst perhaps they were

abused, as the best institutions frequently are, intimacies were then formed which increasing years only cemented the more strongly, and formed a kind of brotherhood amongst the parties.

One part of the town long existed as a separate community, and that is what is called the Townhead. Many who resided there were noted smugglers. They lived in a very plain and frugal manner, interchanging convivialities with each other, and the New-year was held by them according to the old, instead of the new style. In speaking of each other they were generally called by some distinguishing name, pointing out their idiosyncrasies. A number of these names has been furnished to me, and it may not be out of place that I should give you a few of them. They are as follow:—Moreover Will, Elwand Steps, Souple Jock, Slaggy Jock, Pump Jock, Rowly Jock, Cutty Will, Bushelbreeks, Quietquarters, Clowty Kits, Mousemark, Gipsy Jamie, Broom Davie, Dollar Davie, Dollar Jock, Doll Jean, Solomon, &c. There are some present to-night, who could without any difficulty give you the interpretation of these names, but it would serve no good end. The parties to whom they applied have long since “gone the way of all the earth,” and the Townhead itself, like other parts of the town, is, with few exceptions, now inhabited by a race that can claim no kindred to them. There were, however, other characters in the town of no little celebrity, and it may be interesting to bring before you a few of them, with anecdotes and incidents which have been handed down regarding them, repeated at many a fire-side, but not generally known. Some of them have appeared in print, but they are still worthy of a rehearsal.

George Goudie was precentor in the Old Church, and officiated for some time after he lost the use of his limbs,

one of his sons carrying him regularly to church on his back. He was much annoyed by a tailor of the name of John Logan, who sat in the Trades Loft, and always began the tune at the same time. John had a strong stentorian voice, and was rather proud of his performance as a vocalist. One day, on the tune being started, John, as was his wont, took it up; and the precentor, who was not in the best of humour, deliberately shut his book, and looking up to the minister who was officiating, said, "Logan's awa' with it again." This did not stop John, who, as my informant says, carried on the singing religiously until he was interrupted by two of the town's officers, who had been ordered to remove him. They dragged him from his seat and took him out of the Church, he singing the tune all the time, till they reached the foot of the Kirk Port. With the view of frightening him and so deterring him from doing the like again, they marched him off to the old Jail (which was certainly very summary justice), where he remained over night. His wife sent him blankets to keep him warm. John had large shoes filled with tacketts, and taking them off, he hammered away at the blankets to such an extent that he had them all in shreds in the morning. When his wife came down to receive him on his liberation, she saw what he had done, and exclaimed, "Preserve me, John, what hae you been doing wi' my guid blankets that never were on a bed before!" "Your blankets," replied he, "what way did you no send word to me that they were *your* blankets? I thocht they belonged to the jail folks." George Goudie was succeeded by the celebrated Robert Gale, one of the finest leaders of psalmody in the West of Scotland, and when he was appointed, Logan was heard to say—"You have got a gale, but I'll blow you a hurricane."

James Murdoch, messenger-at-arms, well known

under the epithets of "Pie Jamie" and "Crunch," was at one time one of the greatest bucks in the town, and plumed himself on his fine appearance. There was one good quality which he possessed, that he never ordered anything until he required it; but the unfortunate thing was that when he gave his order, it must be executed immediately. One day he gave an order to Deacon Brown, who was his tailor, to have a white vest ready for him in a few hours, and this was done. It so happened, however, that the strings behind were sewn wide apart, and the man who made the vest had tied the strings too close so as to make the vest too tight when it was tried on. Mr Murdoch, without noticing the cause, at once threw the vest aside as a misfit. A day or two afterwards, he was standing in Sandgate Street speaking to a few gentlemen, when Deacon Brown made his appearance, and he at once hailed him and complained of his having made the vest too strait. The Deacon heard him out and then quietly remarked that he was thankful he had fitted him at last, as, in his opinion, he should never have been out of a *strait waist-coat*. Another story is told of the same parties. Standing with his back to the fire in the Deacon's room, dressed up in the highest fashion with knee-breeches and top-boots, Mr Murdoch said, "I think, Deacon, had I played my cards well, I might have been on the bench by this time." "The bench, did you say," says the Deacon, "I suppose you mean the tailor's bench?" At one time there happened to be an eclipse, which Mr Murdoch, who was a great pedestrian, had travelled to the country to see. On his return he met some friends, who asked him what he thought of it, and his reply was that it was a total failure.

Peter Paterson, tanner in Mill Street, was a great

hand at draughts, and would travel any distance to meet his match. It is said that he once took horse to Glasgow to have a game with some celebrated player, and after a protracted trial was defeated. This annoyed him very much, and on his way home, on thinking over the matter, he saw the mistake which he had committed, and, though then in the middle of Mearns Moor, about twelve miles distant, he wheeled about his horse, returned to Glasgow, met his opponent, and had the satisfaction of beating him. He had a nephew who was a doctor of medicine, resident in the town, with whom a gentleman from England was staying at the time, and being desirous of a game at draughts, he said that he would invite a friend to play with him. He accordingly sent for Peter, but did not apprize his friend who he was. The two played for several hours, and the Englishman was constantly beat. At last his temper got the better of him, and rising to his feet, he exclaimed, "You be either the d——l himself or Peter Paterson." Peter was fond of other games in addition to draughts, and in particular he was a very keen curler. One day he was skipping a rink on the mill dam, in connection with a parish match, and one of his players was a maltster, with more conceit than brains. The stones were lying in a nice position, when this maltster, whose turn it was to play, was told to be sure and not disturb them, and only to come past the hog score; but regardless of the direction, he sent up his stones with full force, and scattered the others right and left. Peter looked first at the stones, and then at the maltster—"Aye, man," says he, "you're just what I aye thoct you were. To the breek-band—heads you're draff, and a' aboon that is barm."

A party who was engaged in the trade of a soap boiler and tallow chandler, had a great resemblance, as many

thought, to Bonaparte, and from that circumstance was well known under that name, and was very proud of it. His soap works were situated near the bottom of a close, a little beyond Maggie Osborne's house. In 1813, or thereabouts, he required and ordered a new soap boiler from the Carron Company, which they sent to the Broomielaw for transmission by one of the small regular traders which sailed between Glasgow and Ayr. The boiler arrived all safe on the deck of the packet. Preparations were made for having it carted to its destination, but it was found that the entry or close-mouth in High Street was far too narrow to admit it, on which the so-called Bonaparte got into a panic, and was at his wit's end what to do. He met Mr James Morris, then in business as a china merchant, to whom he explained his dilemma, and, with that foresight and force of character which he has always manifested, he suggested that he should float the boiler up the river to the foot of the close, which was then considerably wider. His friend replied that he thought he was taking his fun out of him, and asked him if he thought he was such a fool as to believe that iron would swim. Mr Morris assured him that he was quite serious, and took a wager, which was accepted, that he would accomplish it. He accordingly made his arrangements: got a boat well manned, threw a rope round the boiler, hoisted it off the deck, and lowered it gently down to the water, on which it floated; a line was attached to the rope which was round the boiler, and fastened to a ring in the stern of the boat. Mr Morris then stepped into the boiler, and gave the signal to the men to pull away. The matter having got wind, crowds lined both the quay and the New and Old Bridges. The boiler floated along amid the cheers of the multitude, and was safely landed at the appointed place. It was afterwards a standing joke that this was

the first iron vessel that was ever launched or sailed in the Firth of Clyde or anywhere else.

A merchant in the town, named Robert Mackay, was proprietor of a Newton freedom, which he often visited, and in his eyes it seems to have magnified itself into great dimensions. A friend, on meeting him, asked him where he had been, and he replied that he had just been taking a walk round his property, and that it was a grand thing for a party to have a bit ground of his own that he could spit on. It came to be a kind of byword by many that, like Bobby Mackay, they had been taking a walk round their property. He was at one time a cloth merchant, and latterly engaged in the wine and spirit trade. His articles, in his own estimation, were much superior to any others. By way of setting off the rarity and superior excellence of any cloth he sold, or of any liquor which he presented to you, he would say—'The fact is, sir, the same article cannot now be had, for the man is dead that made it.' This remark also came to be turned into a proverb, and even to this day the quality of many things is extolled by the remark that the man is dead who made them.

Few characters are more remembered, or have had more extensive notice, than "Rab" Hamilton, who was a native of the town. You would class him among those imbeciles who are comparatively harmless until they are roused, and this was the character of "Rab." He was of a very waggish disposition, and delighted in a wandering life. Attempts were made to keep him in the Poor's-house, and on one occasion a log of wood was chained to his leg; but the confinement did not agree with him, and watching his opportunity on one occasion, he clutched up the log and chain, and walked straight to the shipbuilding yard, where he was relieved of his incumbrance, and left the town for some years. Unfor-

unately he had a strong liking for strong drink, and was not very particular as to the kind of drink he took, "sour yill" being taken as greedily as anything else. He was a constant frequenter of Mrs Cuthbert's famous ale-house in Newton, and on one occasion he was presented with a tumbler of this "sour yill." After taking it he said—"Grand yill, mistress, grand yill; was it made this year, na?" It is said that he met his death at the age of 65, in consequence of some parties about New or Old Cumnock giving him a quantity of this "sour yill," mixed with a doze of tobacco juice.

I have little recollection of "Rab;" but the stories that are told of him are very numerous, and one or two must suffice. Dr Peebles was minister of Newton, and "Rab" was a faithful attendant on his ministry. One day he wandered into the Old Church, and having put his head between some wooden rails, he could not get it back on account of his very large ears, and in great trepidation bawled out—"Murder! my head 'll hae to be cutted aff. Holy minister, congregation, O my head maun be cutted aff! It's a judgment o' heaven upon me for leaving the godly Dr Peebles at the Newton." Rab, through the assistance of the beadle, got his head out, and took his sudden departure. It is said that shortly after this, Rab met Dr Auld, who inquired at him the cause of the disturbance, which he told after his own fashion; and then the Doctor said—"You had better come and hear me preach." "No, deed, sir," he replied, "ye dinna preach, ye only read."

As "Rab" took wandering turns throughout the county, he was well known to the clergy, and at Presbytery meetings in Ayr he was sure to keep hovering among them expecting a harvest of coppers. On one occasion the members of Presbytery were all congre-

gated in front of the King's Arms Hotel, waiting to be called in to the usual Presbytery dinner. "Rab," with his pock (in which he used to gather sand for sale) over his shoulder, was addressing them one after another. Dr Auld feeling scandalized at this annoyance to the brethren, with the authority of the Parish Minister, ordered "Rab" to go away. "Dr Auld, Dr Auld, dye ken, I had a dream." "Go away with your dream," said Dr Auld. "A dream, a dream!" cried several of the ministers, gathering round him. "Let's hear Rab's dream." "Weel, ye see, braw ministers, I dreamit a dream. I dreamit I was dead, and I speelit up a lang ladder amang ye cluds away to heaven. An when I cam to the gate, I knockit. An ye angel he opened ye door and says, 'wha's there?' Its me, Robin Hamilton, frae ye auld town o' Ayr. "Come awa in, said ye angel, glad to see you, Robin, for there hasna been a soul come here frae ye auld town o' Ayr this 40 years." The dream set the Presbytery into a roar of laughter at Robin's crafty style of retaliation.

Once, when the Rev. Mr Cuthill visited the Poor's-house, he asked a blessing on the breakfast of which the inmates were about to partake. When taking his departure, Rab remarked, "Ou ay, Mr Cuthill, there's surely a blessing on the Puirshouse parritch; for when I tak' a spoonfu' out, they aye fill up again."

There was a character named Daft Jamie from Glasgow, well known in that city, who paid a visit to Ayr on one occasion, and falling in with Rab, the two agreed to adjourn to Mrs Culbert's ale house in Newton, and have a quart of ale between them. The jug was brought to them, and Rab lifting it up, swallowed the contents without drawing a breath. Laying down the jug he said, "Ye see that's the Ayrshire fashion;" "and that," said the disappointed Jamie, grasping the empty jug

and knocking him down with it, "that's the Glasgow fashion." Rab's excuse for what he did was, that he wanted to see the bonnie wee flower at the bottom of the jug. On getting to his feet he muttered, "Serves me richt; it'll be a while or you catch me drinking wi' daft folk again." It was a common remark with Rab when offered a penny and a sixpence, and asked which he would take, "I's not be greedy," said he, "I'll tak' the wee ane."

Another character of no little celebrity was General Brown, who moved from place to place; and his visits to the town always created a good deal of excitement, especially among the big and little boys. It is said that he was originally bred to the army, fought in the Peninsula, and distinguished himself in Ireland; but in consequence of an injury in his head his mind gave way. He never rose to any position, however, beyond a mere private; and had he lived in our day, he certainly would have been taken up as a lunatic. His dress generally consisted of a cocked hat, feather, and scarlet coat, which flowed well down to his heels, with ribbons streaming from his hat, and a ponderous stick in his right hand. He had a broken nose and a considerable halt—his left leg being somewhat shorter than his right, and he usually carried with him a long white horn, with which he announced his approach to the different towns which he visited, and a tin box which he made himself believe contained Government despatches. Such was the appearance of the man, about whom a great deal could be said; but with all his lofty pretensions, he was content to make his sleeping apartments the stables of the King's Arms or the Black Bull. Wherever he went he attracted a large number of followers; and when he became excited with drink, which was very often, he would rush at the crowd flourishing his stick, and shouting at

the top of his voice, "Charge, charge!—death or victory!" This he would repeat till his supposed enemy had dispersed, and the effect would cause him to foam at the mouth and perspire most copiously, giving him a wildish appearance. Sometimes his trusty oak would fell to the ground some unlucky youth who failed to get out of his way in time, and the General stumbling over him would fall to the ground upon his head with such force that you fancied he was killed. On these occasions the town's officers would interfere, and convey him to his apartments, where, after a night's rest, he reappeared as if nothing had been wrong with him.

Sergeant Shaw was another character which figured largely. He was a quiet, inoffensive creature; but he fancied he could pull down the moon. Taking off his hat he would place it down on the street, and extending his arms he would move them back and forwards, as if drawing something from the clouds, and this he called pulling down the moon. He would also stand up in front of a shop window and square at it, as if he was going to knock his hand through it.

Other characters, such as Skeecher Willie *alias* Willie Mitchell, Tip Murray, Fiddie Baird, Jock Nicol, David Haswell or Hassell, who all lived prior to 1840, afford matter for many curious stories, but the mere mention of their names is sufficient. Of later date were Blood, Jamie Rumpie, and Gibb M'Whirter, &c., who have all disappeared; and if we have none of those imbeciles moving about now, it is owing to the fact that the Lunacy Act lays hold of them, and they are kept in confinement. No doubt many are put into the Asylum who are perfectly harmless, but even these apparently harmless creatures sometimes have their ebullitions, and commit crimes which they could not have committed had they been under restraint; and on the

principle that prevention is better than cure, the present law is a very salutary one.

Those who lived at the commencement of the present century must be much impressed with the contrast which, in a physical point of view, the ministers of the present day bear to their predecessors. Dr Stevenson, the minister of the Anti-Burgher or Original Secession Church, was upwards of six feet in height, of a stout build, and a very commanding appearance. Dr Schaw of the Burgher, afterwards the United Secession, and latterly the United Presbyterian Church, had a very portly figure, and a most venerable appearance; and as he walked from his house in Charlotte Street, to his Church across the water, dressed in gown and bands, few sights were more impressive. Dr Peebles of Newton was a stout, short-sized person, with a countenance which was not easily forgotten. Dr Auld was a meek, gentle person, above the usual height, well-proportioned, and moved along with a slow, stately, measured step. Mr Cuthill was tall and stout, and of a bashful, retiring disposition. It is rather remarkable that in their day the approach of any of them excited a kind of awe or dread among the young, who, on their appearance, would cease their play, and take to flight. No such dread is now manifested, and it is well that it is so, as there is no cause for entertaining such a feeling, but the reverse. In their pulpit ministrations there was a marked distinction between them, and each had his own admirers. Among the Established clergy, Dr Peebles was looked up to as the only Evangelical minister in his communion, within a radius of 12 miles. Many who attended his ministry, however, felt the inconvenience arising from the law which then existed, and I believe still exists, by which one parish minister cannot dispense ordinances in the parish of another, without liberty

asked and received; and this, coupled with other considerations, led to the formation of the Relief Church, now the U.P. Church, Cathcart Street, in 1816. Many who connected themselves with that Church were then in the habit, and for years subsequently, of going, on communion occasions, to Ochiltree; and a sad event occurred in June, 1823, in connection with such a visit. On returning from the communion on a Sabbath evening, John M'Clure, a weaver, was attacked by two men, Anderson and Glen, and two women, on the rising ground of the road a little beyond the present cemetery. He was in company with others, and was brought home in a machine which came up, and though severely assaulted, no serious consequences were anticipated. He had, however, received internal injuries of a fatal nature, and died suddenly within an hour after reaching home. Intelligence of the event soon spread, and crowds hurried out in search of the murderers, who were discovered in the wood next the river. They were afterwards tried at Edinburgh, and the two men were convicted and executed. A round stone in the wall still marks the spot where the fatal deed was perpetrated.

At one time it was the practice for members of churches, guilty of certain immoralities, to appear in church and be publicly rebuked, on the principle as laid down by the Apostle Paul, "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear." In my younger days the practice was common, and I remember of the same party being rebuked several times. In connection with this practice, an incident is recorded relative to Dr Peebles, which is highly creditable to his feelings. A young woman belonging to his congregation had unfortunately erred, and being desirous of church privileges, she had to submit to this public rebuke. Her lover, however, setting the influence of the kirk-session at

defiance, refused to apologise in any manner of way for his conduct, and resolved to attend the church to witness the contrition of the poor girl, and to glory over her shame. The narrative states that he took his seat, which was a front one, as usual, and when the poor girl stood up at the desire of the minister, he was seen to smile while he gazed on her abashed and downcast countenance. Dr Peebles was observant of his unmanly conduct, and felt strangely excited by it. Turning from the "fair penitent," and fixing his eyes sternly on her deceiver, he addressed him in a voice of more than usual seriousness and power. "And you, J—— R——, rise also; for though you have not come voluntarily forward to confess your transgression, you are nevertheless the more guilty of the two. I say, J—— R——, stand up and be rebuked." All eyes were instantly withdrawn from the young woman, and directed to the seat of the non-plussed and astonished Lothario, who, crestfallen, could have crept into a nut-shell, had it been possible. Again the minister repeated his command in a tone still more authoritative: the culprit looked round in despair—he would have fled, but the church was crowded, and no one seemed willing to make way for him. At length he rose with a countenance so highly flushed as to bespeak the mental torture under which he was suffering, and to the evident satisfaction of the congregation, was made the object of one of the most severe castigations they had ever heard from the pulpit.

So far as the Newton Church is concerned, this practice, I am told, came into disuse from the following cause:—A ship carpenter fell to be rebuked, and he invited his fellow workmen and friends to be present, and when he was asked to stand up they were instructed by him to stand up along with him. This they accordingly did, so that the real offender

could not be distinguished, and no attempt was afterwards made to renew it. Private admonition in presence of the Session is now almost the universal practice, and this mode of discipline is certainly preferable.

As the law now stands, any party apprehended on a criminal charge and brought to trial can insist on an adjournment of his trial for 48 hours, that he may have an opportunity of adducing witnesses for his defence, if he has any, and to have an agent present to conduct his defence; but an entirely different course prevailed at a former period. Parties were apprehended and taken at once before one of the bailies and sentenced to a fine or imprisonment without even having the opportunity of establishing their innocence. It was quite a common thing to see crowds in front of one of the bailie's shops whilst the culprit was before him undergoing trial, and it need not be wondered at that this system often led to much injustice. No doubt a sentence of imprisonment was nothing then compared with now, and had not the same terrors in prospect. The law is now more stringent in compelling prisoners very properly to perform their allotted task of work, and to conform themselves to certain regulations under the dread of punishment. The old jail afforded no accommodation for airing prisoners, but when the new jail was opened there was a large yard appropriated for that purpose. On a Sabbath morning, soon after it was in use, a number of the prisoners were taking their accustomed airing, when Kelso Kennedy, the son of the old jailor, who acted as assistant turnkey, went amongst them with the keys in his hand. One or two of the more daring laid hold of him and seized the keys, and made a general jail delivery. So soon as Kelso could get to his feet he found his prisoners all gone, and being rather an indifferent walker at the best he was unable to give chase. He

went straight to the Old Church to apprise his father, who was there, and the magistrates, of what had happened; but as he had a great stammer in his speech, which excitement only increased, it was with difficulty they could make out what was wrong, but he led them to understand that they were all up the Low Green. Great excitement prevailed, and there was a general pursuit of them, which resulted in their capture, though two of the worst eluded pursuit for a considerable time. It led to a stricter surveillance being exercised over them afterwards, and such a casualty would be now impossible. Poor Kelso could never get the better of his mishap, and any allusion to it put him into a towering passion. He had a great deal of the milk of human kindness about him, and on one occasion he manifested it in rather a peculiar way. A poor fellow being about to be led forth to execution shewed great nervousness, and Kelso, patting him on the shoulder, gamped out, "keep up your heart, man, for it 'ill soon be o'er."

The administration of the law in our Sheriff Court was for long very slow, expensive, and unsatisfactory; but now it is much more simple and expeditious, though, as regards expense, I fear that litigants have still too much ground for complaint, and it would be better for all concerned were there a further reduction in that direction. In the early part of the century Sheriff Murdoch was the acting substitute, and he was succeeded by Sheriff Eaton, who is much better remembered, and who only retired from active duty about 1845. Whatever opinion might be formed of him, for he was certainly a strange compound, he had at least a good stock of sound common sense and considerable discernment of character, but lacked that dignity and decorum which his successor has always displayed. He made no pretensions to forensic eloquence, and his

invariable address to a jury was, "Noo, gentlemen, you have heard the facts of the case, lay your heads the gither and return such a verdict as you think proper. This was short and to the point, and served the purpose fully as well as the more elaborate addresses to which we are now accustomed. One good quality he possessed was, in pushing forward his work, and his great boast was the rapidity with which he could dispose of a certain number of cases. This, in fact, was his weakness. A friend met him one day on his return from Irvine, where he had been holding a Small Debt Court, "Weel, Sandy," says he, "I have just been at Irvine and decided 80 cases, and it's no twa o'clock yet." However sound his decisions might be, he very seldom attempted giving reasons, and it would have been very difficult sometimes to have given any. Being born and brought up in the locality, he had a very accurate knowledge of people, and knew them all, as a witty friend remarked, by "lug mark." It was quite a common thing for him to address parties in a suit by their usual name, and to use great liberties with them. The stories told of scenes in Court are endless, some of them of a nature you could hardly repeat, and I can only venture on one or two. A respectable merchant in Ayr was summoned by his father-in-law for articles supplied his wife previous to her marriage. He denied the debt, and the Sheriff having heard the nature of the case, addressing the pursuer, said, "I think, Robin, you should be ashamed of yourself for affronting your decent daughter in this way by raking up such an account. I dismiss the case." Robin replied, "You canna do that without hearing me, and I must be heard." "Awa', awa'," said the Sheriff, "the case has been decided." A quirky creature from Maybole, who was very frequently in Court, and seemed to understand the law

of prescription, was summoned for a debt, and on making his appearance, the Sheriff said, "What hae you to say the day, Hugh?" when he replied that the account was prescribed, and he was ready to swear that it was not owing. The Sheriff, who knew his man at once, said, "Well, Hugh, we'll no let you. I decern." On another occasion there was a farmer who was constantly in Court, and had rather a bad reputation. His defence was that his account was prescribed, and the pursuer agreed to refer it to his oath, in the belief that he would decline to take the oath. He did take it, however, and judgment was pronounced in his favour. On leaving the Court, the pursuer met him outside and upbraided him for having previously promised to pay, and asked him how he, in the face of that promise, could take such an oath. "Man," said he, "do ye think I was going to affront myself afore yon gentlemen, after I said I would tak' the oath. Come awa' doun the street wi' me and I'll gie ye your siller."

The period from 1800 to 1819 was full of excitement from two very different causes—the one connected with the war and the other with the Radical movement. Nowhere, perhaps, was greater loyalty displayed, men of all classes enrolling themselves as volunteers to repel the expected invaders, and to fight, if need be, for their hearths and their homes. Even the very boys drank in the martial spirit, and paraded the town in companies, armed with wooden swords. An old veteran, now in his 80th year, born and brought up in the place, informs me that he belonged to one of these companies, and he recollects as vividly as yesterday a song which was then very popular, the air of which also is quite familiar to him. This was in 1802. When the boys turned out, a tall man, who was a ballad singer, placed himself at their head, and, as they stopped here and there, he led

off with the song, and, at the end of each verse, they set up a ringing cheer. He has favored me with the words of the song, and as it is a rarity, you may possibly wish to hear it.

Noo Bonaparte's coming, they tell us,
An' what will he do when he comes?
He thinks we're a' fleyed for his numbers--
We'll rin at the soun' of his drums.
But, come when he likes, he'll be cheated,
An' that he will find to his cost;
For tho' he the Austrians defeated,
O'er Britons he never shall boast.
Then wha' wouldna be a brave sodger,
And fecht for his country's laws;
Before that we yield to a tyrant,
We'll die in a glorious cause.
Then up brither Britons, an' at him,
An' shew that your hearts are o' steel;
An' meet him, an' fecht him, an' beat him,
An' send him to France or the deil.

Fortunately, our fears of an invasion proved groundless, and equally so the rising of the Radicals. Exaggerated statements had been circulated regarding them, and those who had property fancied that the intention was to lay hold of it and have a common division. Many suffered in those days for giving utterance to sentiments that are now considered harmless. Spies were then employed, who distorted what they had heard to suit their own views and gain the approbation of their employers, and the excitement was so great that the most unlikely stories were greedily received. Our own town furnished two or three companies of volunteers to quell any disturbance that might be attempted. Not long after they were embodied, they were hurriedly called out one Sabbath night in consequence of a

rumour that the town was to be attacked and the banks plundered by a large body of Radicals. For several nights they kept strict watch, but no enemy appeared, and we are not sure that their services on any occasion were required. There was a great gathering of the Radicals in the winter of 1819, on a vacant space of ground in Wallacetown, called Anderson's Riggs, behind the Cross-keys. They walked in procession to Kilmar-nock, and returned carrying torch-lights. No disturbance, however, took place, but the leaders thought it prudent to keep out of the way for a time, lest they should be apprehended, so dangerous was it in those days to agitate for reform. Happily, the utmost toleration is now enjoyed alike by Whig, Radical, and Tory, and notwithstanding the numerous reforms which have since been effected, property is as safe, and monarchy as much in the ascendant as ever they were.

Like other places, our town has been occasionally visited with epidemics, which have proved very fatal, but nothing since the beginning of the century can be compared to the visitation of cholera in 1832. As many as thirty interments took place in one day; and the Old Churchyard was so limited in accommodation that additional ground had to be acquired, and that part is still known as the Cholera burial ground. Many who at night were in good health, ere the morning's sun dawned were numbered with the dead; and so great was the panic which prevailed that parties could with difficulty be found to lay out the bodies, and a cart went constantly round, into which the coffins were put and conveyed to the place of burial. The fatality was greatest above the Wallace Tower, and so long as the pestilence raged, tar barrels and torches were kept burning day and night, and every one who could manage to escape removed to the country, and only returned when all

danger was over. It was a melancholy time. Business was in a great measure neglected—"men's hearts failing them for fear"—and it was long ere it recovered from the blow. The severest trials, however, are designed for good by the All-Wise disposer of events; and one good result from this visitation was, that it led the way to the adoption of those sanitary measures which are so essential to the health and comfort of every community; and I am glad to say, that we have reaped the benefit to a very large extent.

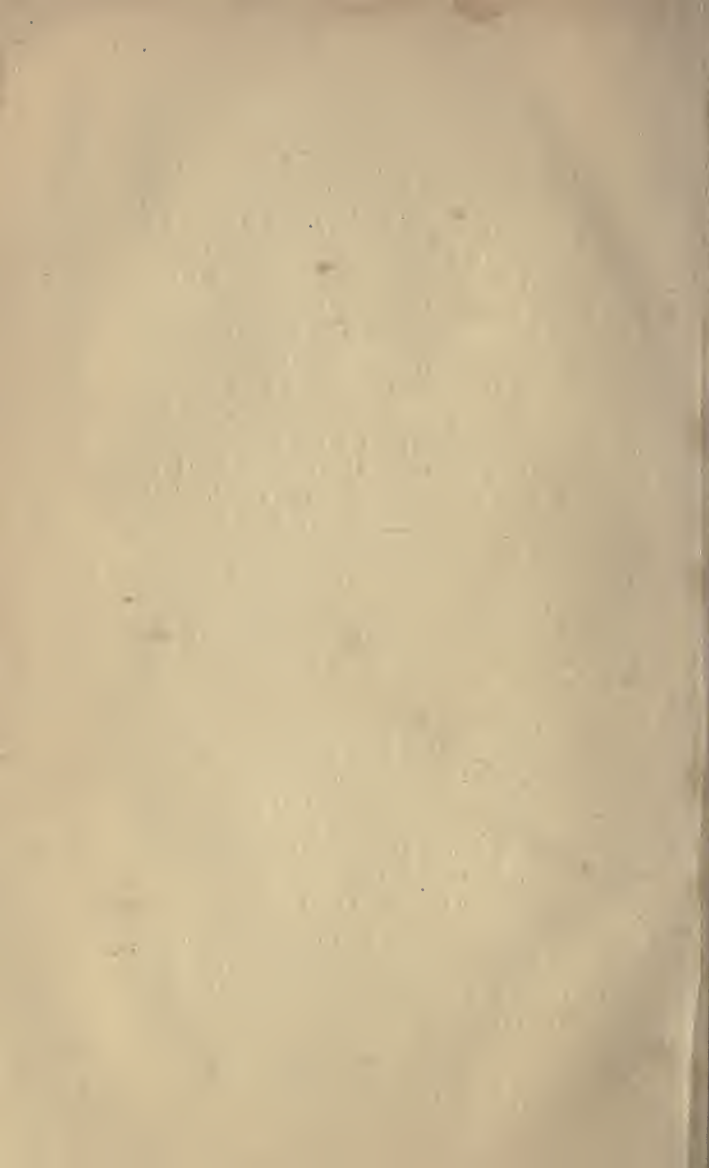
There are other matters to which I might have alluded, some of them, in the opinion of many of you, perhaps more important than those already noticed; but I have purposely omitted them, as I have already transgressed too much upon your time, and I must now draw to a close. We have cause, I think, to be proud of our town. Nature has done much for it in the beauty of the surrounding scenery and the fine walks in its neighbourhood, affording variety of every kind to the traveller. For health and cleanliness it stands almost at the top of the ladder; and the Registrar's returns, if I mistake not, shew, in comparison with other places, that the death-rate is about the lowest. We have schools in abundance, adapted to all classes; and the Academy, which under its former masters attracted pupils from all parts of the world, still retains its prestige, and was never better attended than at present. Our churches are filled by clergymen sound in the faith, and labouring with zeal in their Master's service. Trade and commerce are now carried on with more vigour and success than ever, and our town is extending right and left with villas which are an ornament to it. Compared with the early part of this century, we may say without hesitation, that its progress in almost every respect has been onward and forward, and the improvement has been so great and

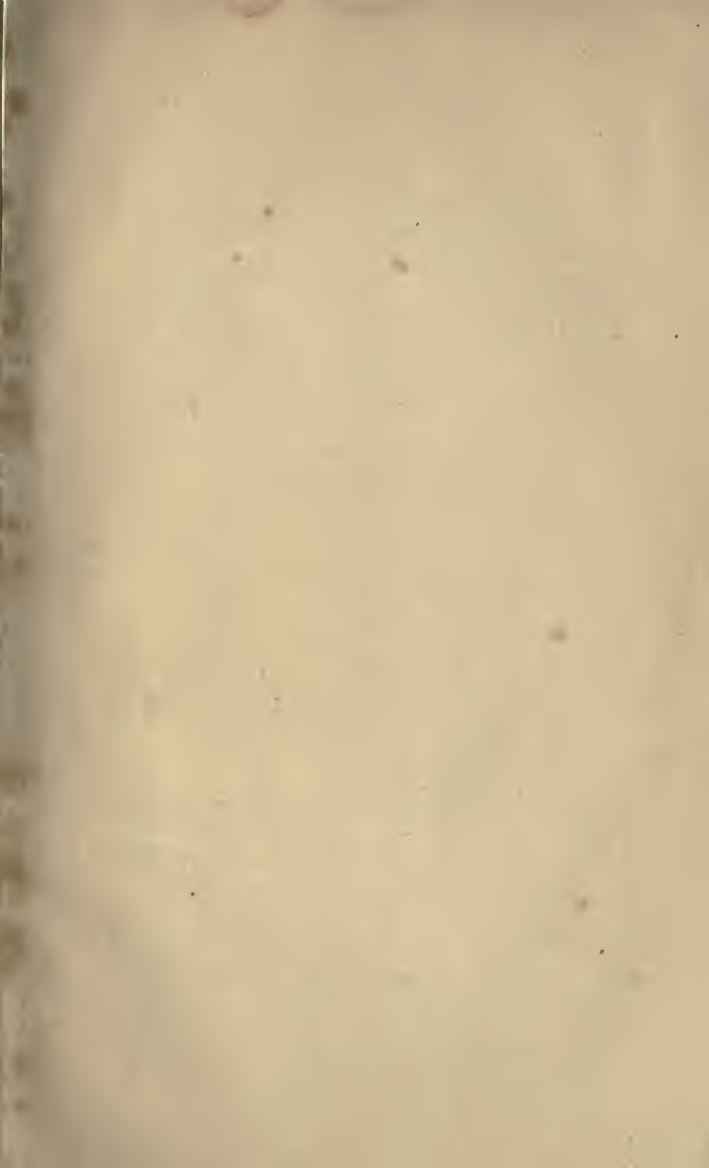
marked, that those only who lived *then* and *now* can fully realize it. Let us not "rest and be thankful," but rather foster and prosecute more sternly than ever the spirit of improvement, so that Ayr may continue to retain the good name it has so long enjoyed, and which our own Bard has immortalised in verse. No doubt much still remains to be done, and if only a Peabody or Coats would arise in our midst, he would find a sufficient outlet in many ways for the display of his liberality. Could not the vacant spot of ground at the head of Sandgate Street, the present appearance of which is a standing reproach to the whole community, be turned to profitable account with some fine building of general use, bearing the name of the generous and honoured donor? Could not our Beach be made more serviceable as a promenade, the drains of course being removed, and a fine carriage way made as far as the River Doon? Such a thing has been often talked of, and however impracticable or Utopian it may appear in the estimation of some, there is little doubt that "where there's a will there's a way," and if a serious effort was only made, something grand could be accomplished. It is not merely for its outward aspect and comfort, however, that we should be zealous. In the past it has been distinguished as the birthplace of many who have filled most important positions at home and abroad. They are to be found in the Senate, in the pulpit, on the bench, at the bar, in the army and navy, and some have also become merchant princes. Need I say that we look to the rising generation to follow in their steps; and if my voice could reach them, it would be in language such as this—You possess advantages of a superior nature, see that you improve them. The press teems with serials of every variety, many of a questionable and demoralising nature; see that you exercise a sound judgment in reading only

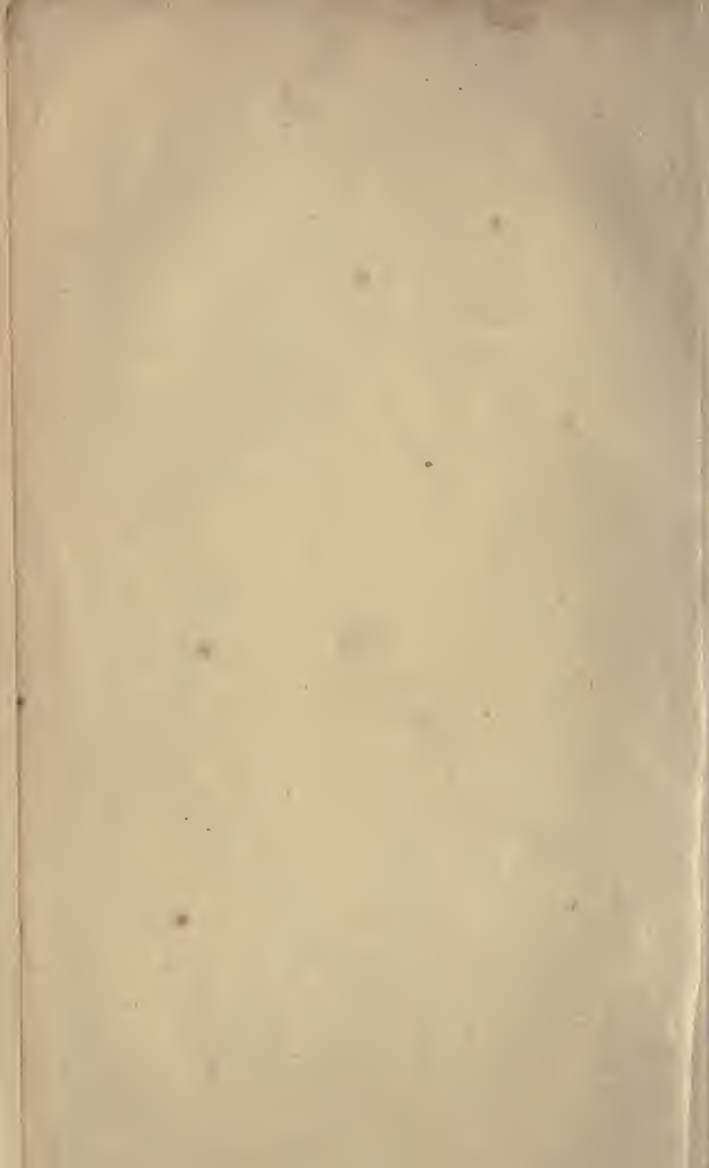
what is fitted to enlighten the mind and to fit you more efficiently for the active duties of life, and for performing your part well in the world. You have a Library well stored with works of the best authors, carefully selected, and suitable to all ranks and classes. This is a boon which should be gladly hailed, and largely taken advantage of. Knowledge can only be acquired by patient, persevering application ; and the wisest of men hath said, "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." No one ever yet rose to eminence in any walk of life who had not lofty aspirations ; and it is of great consequence, therefore, to set before you a high standard, and to endeavour to excel in whatever you may select. "The field is the world," and all barriers in the way of your attaining the highest honours and distinctions in every department of Church and State are now happily removed. Cultivate your talents, therefore, in the direction in which your tastes and inclinations lead you, and whatever may be your aim in life, let the motto of each of you be—

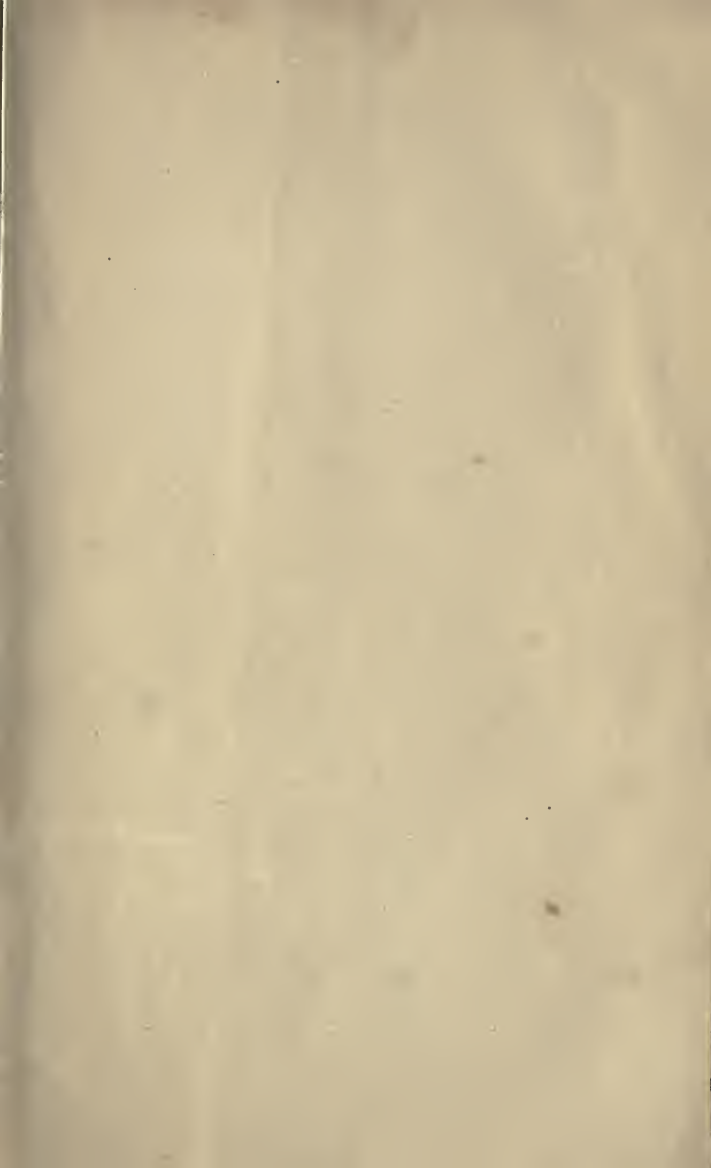
I live for those that love me,
For those that know me true ;
For the heaven that smiles above me,
And waits my coming, too ;
For the cause that needs assistance,
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the future in the distance,
For the good that I can do.

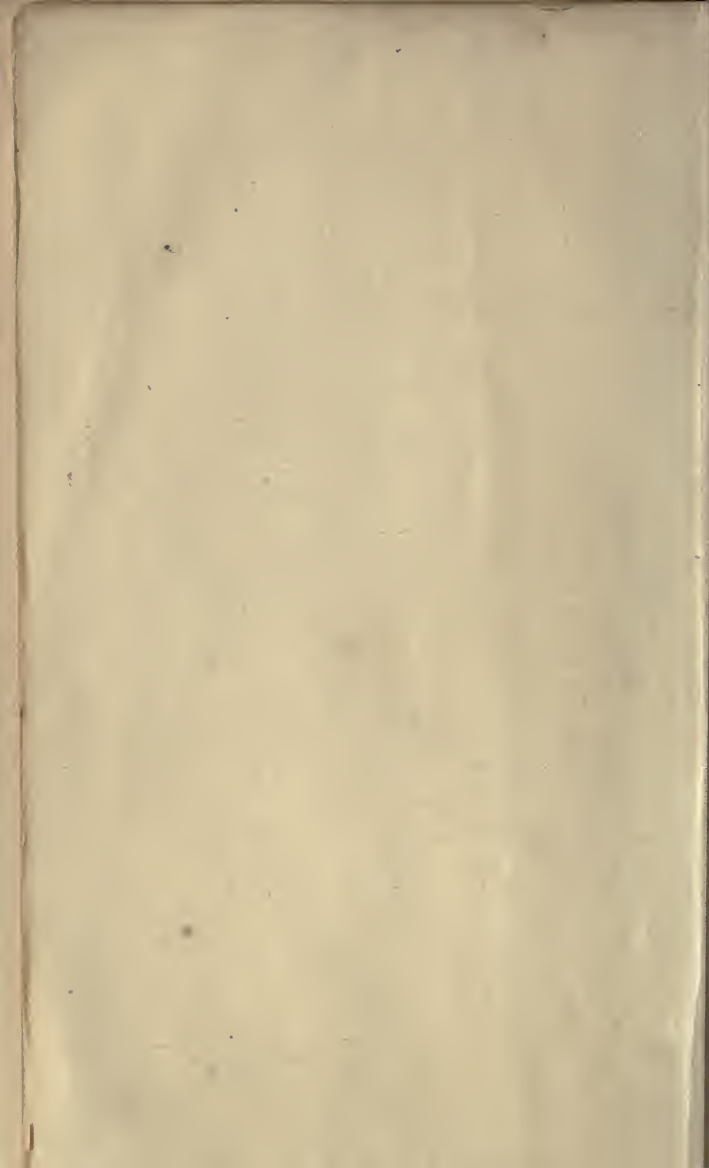
The lecture was listened to throughout with great interest, and was frequently applauded. At the close, on the motion of Mr Thomson, mathematical teacher, a hearty vote of thanks was tendered to Mr Gray.

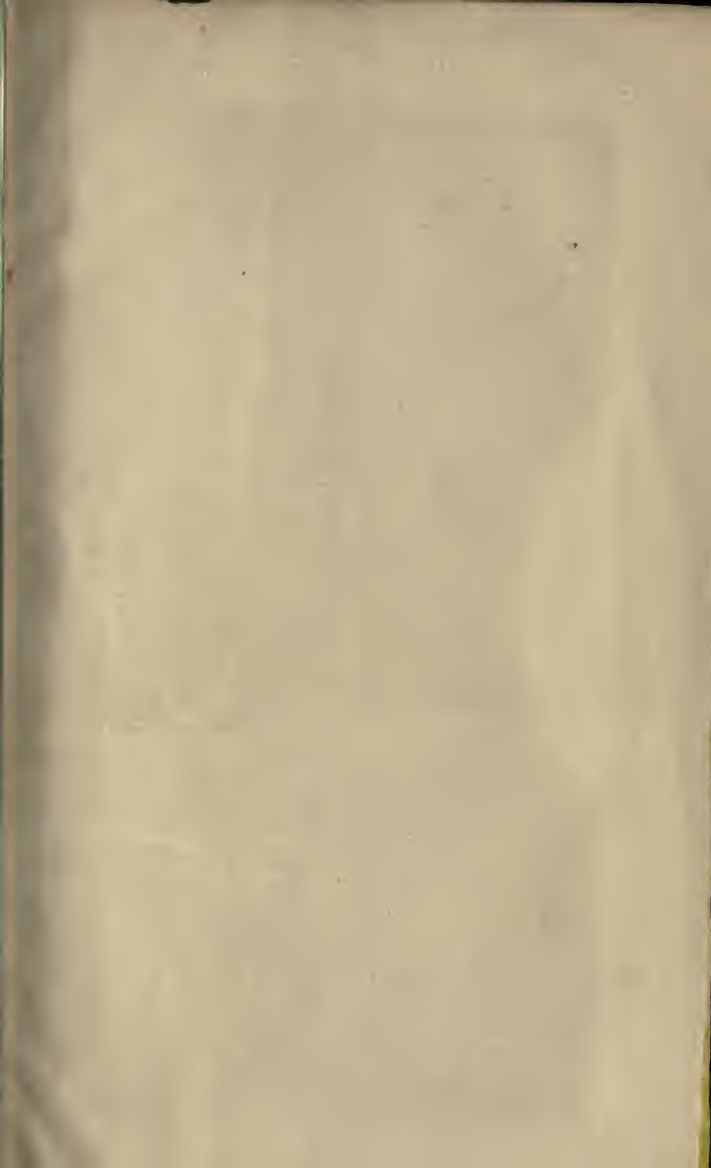


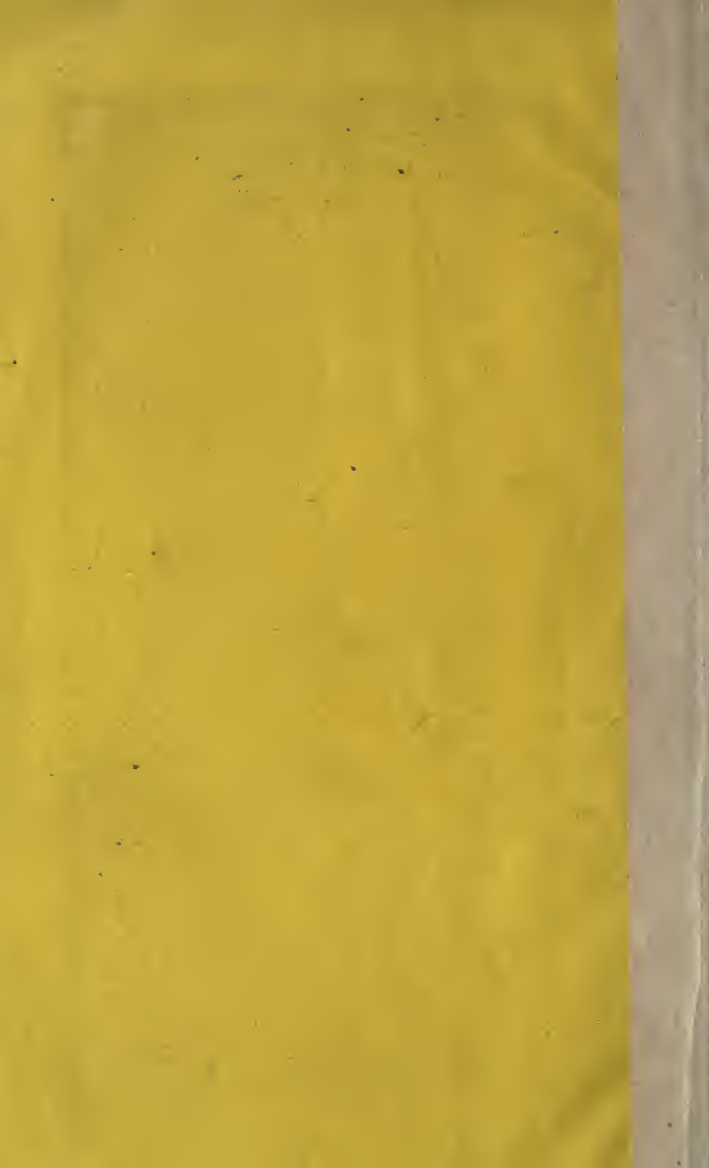












278844

HE

G7793a

Author[Gray, Henry C]

Title The auld town o' Ayr.

**University of Toronto
Library**

**DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET**

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File"
Made by **LIBRARY BUREAU**

